



CALIFORNIA ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY NEWS RELEASE

Department of Toxic Substances Control

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Sutter Health and Its Hospitals Receive Award for Mercury Reduction Efforts

SACRAMENTO – Department of Toxic Substances Control (DTSC) Acting Director Leonard Robinson today commended efforts of Sutter Health and presented a certificate of appreciation for being the first network of California hospitals and physician groups to reduce or virtually eliminate the use of mercury at its member hospitals. By replacing mercury thermometers, lab products, blood pressure cuffs, and other clinical devices containing mercury, Sutter Health affiliates reduced their use of mercury by almost half-a-ton (973 pounds).

“Your network has demonstrated that effective environmental stewardship starts and ends with managers and staff who take actions that end in measurable results,” said Robinson. “Too often, when organizations adopt measures and techniques that protect the environment, those efforts go unnoticed. This certificate is our way of recognizing and commending Sutter hospitals’ achievements,” Robinson added.

“Sutter Health affiliates are dedicated to creating healthy and safe environments for employees and patients,” said Sutter Health Senior Vice President and Chief Risk Officer Michael Evans. “We are proud to be the first health provider network to partner with the Department of Health Services and the DTSC to significantly reduce the amount of mercury in our facilities.”

Mercury is a reproductive toxin and a potent neurotoxin. When hospitals throw away fever thermometers, blood pressure measuring devices, and other mercury-containing products, the chemical can reenter the environment. According to the U.S. EPA, medical waste incinerators are the fourth largest contributor of mercury in the environment. In addition, it estimates that mercury thermometers contribute about 17 tons of mercury disposed of in solid waste landfills annually.

The program is called Hg Elimination Leadership Program, or HELP (Hg is the symbol for mercury on the periodic table of elements). HELP is a joint effort of the DTSC, the California Department of Health Services, the United States Environmental Protection Agency Region IX, Hospitals for a Healthy Environment, the California Hospital Association, and the California Water Environmental Association.

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The program's goal is to stop mercury from re-entering the environment as waste. When fever thermometers, blood pressure cuffs and other products that contain mercury become waste, mercury can re-enter the environment through air, water and soil.

HELP today honored Sutter Health's affiliated hospitals for virtually eliminating mercury. In addition, Sutter Health received a Certificate of Appreciation for reducing its use of mercury.

Hospitals in the Sutter Health network reported the following reductions:

Sutter Delta Medical Center (Antioch)	99.5%
Sutter General (Sacramento)	98.9%
Sutter Roseville Medical Center	98.0%
Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa	96.5%
Sutter Davis Hospital	97.1%
St. Luke's Hospital (San Francisco)	96.3%
California Pacific Medical Center California Campus (San Francisco)	97.5%
Sutter Tracy Community Hospital	89.9%
Alta Bates Summit Medical Center Herrick Campus (Berkeley)	98.4%

For a complete listing of all of the Sutter hospital mercury reductions go to
www.dtsc.ca.gov/HazardousWaste/Mercury

Under the HELP program, hospitals achieve virtual elimination of mercury after they have:

1. Inventoried all mercury devices and sources.
2. Replaced, at minimum, 75 percent of sphygmomanometers (blood pressure cuff machines), clinical mercury-containing devices, laboratory chemicals containing mercury, and mercury laboratory thermometers. A plan must also be developed for total elimination of the remaining devices.
3. Replaced patient mercury thermometers with non-mercury containing devices.
4. Developed and implemented a fluorescent tube recycling program.
5. Developed and implemented a mercury and alkaline battery collection program.
6. Prepared and put into practice an Environmentally Preferable Purchasing (EPP) Statement that bans the purchase of mercury containing items without prior approval.

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The Department of Toxic Substances Control's mission is to restore, protect, and enhance the environment and ensure public health, environmental quality and economic vitality by regulating hazardous waste, conducting and overseeing cleanups, and developing and promoting pollution prevention.